



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1448
Ein cyf/Our ref HIDCC/05515/24

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Government.Committee.Business@gov.wales

14 June 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 24 May on behalf of the Petitions Committee regarding petition *P-06-1446 Stop pollution at Watchtower Bay and Ogmore by Sea*.

Ensuring our water is of the highest quality is a vital part of making Wales a prosperous, happy, and healthy place to live in and visit. High bathing water quality is a priority for the Welsh Government as we continue to see outdoor swimming and water-based recreational activities grow in popularity in Wales. In our Programme for Government, we have made a commitment to begin to designate more of Wales' inland waters for recreation and have strengthened water quality monitoring.

The main purpose of [the Bathing Water Regulations 2013](#) is to identify popular bathing sites for designation and to monitor water quality at these sites during the most popular times. The aim is to protect bathers' health against pollution and provide information to the public to enable them to make informed decisions about where and when they bathe. Significant increase in rainfall over the 2023 bathing season has meant an increase in pollution incidents from a variety of sources including diffuse pollution from agricultural runoff, highway runoff, wastewater discharges, discharges from combined storm overflows and industrial pollution.

Therefore, whilst I fully agree it is disappointing that our two newly designated bathing waters received 'poor' classifications in 2023, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are taking robust action to understand and address the water quality issues in both locations and this in fact demonstrates the bathing water programme is working as it is designed to.

At Watch House Bay, the surrounding catchment is a large complex urban catchment with several storm overflows and two large sewage treatment works. NRW are undertaking several strands of investigation to better understand the relative importance of pollution sources impacting Watch House Bay. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Undertaking compliance reviews of the nearby storm overflow on Harbour Road and Cog Moors wastewater treatment works.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Huw.Irranca-Davies@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Huw.Irranca-Davies@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- Reviewing an investigation report on the Barry Town SPS Short Sea outfall (SSO) trigger event in August 2023. This was provided to NRW by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) on 30 May 2024 in line with the current guidance and permit requirements. NRW can now assess the submission and compliance of the asset with permit conditions.
- Prioritising the permitted discharges in the catchment for further audits in the compliance programme 2024-5. This comprises of a combination of site inspections, monitoring reviews and data audits.

In April, NRW undertook a joint visit to Watch House Bay with the local authority and DCWW to carry out pre-season checks and confirmed that relevant signage had been installed by the local authority, which is a requirement of the Bathing Water Regulations.

Meanwhile, NRW's preliminary investigations into the Ogmore catchment area note the wider catchment is large and there is likely to be diffuse pollution from urban drainage, misconnections and rural land use. There is a large bird population in the lower estuary, grazing livestock as well as regular river crossings from the local stables. Furthermore, there are numerous water company assets in the catchment including sewage treatment works and storm overflows, and several domestic properties with private sewerage arrangements in the estuary. Ogmore received a particularly high sample result on 14 August 2023, but this is not uncommon and there were numerous high level results in 2023, primarily linked to wet weather events.

Similarly to Watch House Bay, NRW are also undertaking several strands of investigation to understand and tackle the pollution sources impacting the Ogmore bathing water. This includes but is not limited to:

- Assessing the storm discharge at nearby Eweny pumping station, which has been identified under the Storm Overflow Assessment Framework (SOAF) programme.
- Reviewing a report from DCWW on nearby Penybont wastewater treatment works, following an event in August 2023 which exceeded the trigger. NRW are also responding to a more recent pollution incident from Penybont in May 2024.
- Working closely with DCWW and local authorities to identify and address misconnections within the catchment.
- Supporting the Vale of Glamorgan Council's work to review and consult on the Public Space Protection Orders covering dog restrictions, following studies proving the impact of dog faeces on beach water quality.
- Prioritising the permitted discharges in the catchment for further audits in the compliance programme 2024-5. This again comprises of a combination of site inspections, monitoring reviews and data audits.

It is worth noting that the nearest surrounding beaches to Ogmore, namely Southerndown, Trecco Bay, Sandy Bay and Rest Bay all achieved 'Excellent' classifications in 2023.

As I am sure the Committee will appreciate, these investigations are progressing well but are complex and require significant time and expense to fully work through, and often rely on supporting action from wider sectors. We expect this work will continue into the next water company Asset Management Period (AMP) and as part of ongoing Price Review process, NRW has stated it requires DCWW to investigate all failing bathing waters during AMP8 (2025-30). The details of what this will specifically entail are currently being finalised and are subject to Ofwat's final determinations due later this year.

The Committee may also be aware of the ongoing investigation into pollution sources in the Ogmore river catchment following the recent pollution incident at Penybont wastewater treatment works in May. Whilst the investigation has not yet concluded, it highlights the crucial role of Bathing Water Designation under the Bathing Water Regulations 2013. This

designation empowered NRW and the Local Authority to swiftly respond, safeguarding bathers' health by declaring an Abnormal Situation (AS). Without this designation, NRW and the Local Authority would not have been able to take such proactive measures when faced with potential pollution or other environmental issues, including providing public notices about potential risks and implementing necessary measures to address the problem. This underscores the effectiveness of the Regulations in protecting public health. As a precautionary measure, an AS was declared at Ogmored-by-Sea beach, emphasising the Regulations' role in prompt response and risk mitigation, thereby ensuring public safety until the situation is resolved.

To conclude, our bathing water programme is designed to identify poor bathing water quality and put measures in place so that locations can meet our expectations with classifications produced on an annual basis. A 'poor' classification in 2023 does not automatically preclude Watch House Bay or Ogmored from meeting the standards in future years once water quality issues are addressed. For example, Marine Lake bathing water had been designated 'poor' in 2022 but following collaborative working between NRW, DCWW and Denbighshire Council, Marine Lake met our stringent standards in 2023.

I hope this comprehensive reply is of use and many thanks for raising this important matter with me.

Yours sincerely,



Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change & Rural Affairs